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## ***Farm Vegetable Boxes in the Classroom***

Opening the biweekly vegetable box from Terra Firma Farm was always a highlight in my sixth grade classroom. As soon as the large waxed cardboard box appeared, students started guessing what was in it. I opened the box, wondering right along with them what gifts from the earth were inside this week. I held up the vegetables, one by one, calling on students to identify them. By two weeks into December, everyone could distinguish Swiss Chard from Red Russian Kale.

Carrots were always greeted with cheers. Most students were interested in eating them or getting the peeling and cutting carrots job which, of course, included tasting. There were several students who, using the *Random House Book of Vegetables*, attempted to pin down the variety of carrots learning to distinguish the Nantes from the Chantenays.

Students learn a classroom routine especially quickly when it's an activity they like. Making a salad was high on my students' list. Cutting boards were passed out, one to a table, with no directions from me. I assigned the remaining jobs being sure to rotate washing the lettuce and using the salad spinner, a favorite job. In short order students distributed all vegetables that did not need cooking to the chopping stations. We always cut up kale and chard, and minced leeks. Potatoes were among the few items that did not make it into the salad unless I had the foresight and time to take them home the night before and cook them.

I passed out the knives with words of caution. The sharp black handled knives had proved much easier to use than the 'safer' pumpkin knives. I had to reach into the Band-Aid box during salad time only once in two years.

There was much discussion over salad dressings. Most students wanted ranch dressing which has a way of making all vegetables taste the same and has high sodium and fat content. We invited a chef from a local restaurant to join us one salad day. He worked with the salad dressing group and showed students how adding minced leeks and various amounts of salt and pepper to oil and vinegar could alter the taste. He encouraged the students to only lightly dress the salad allowing the taste of the vegetables to come through. After the chef's visit, the job of making salad dressing became a favorite and gradually the voices calling for ranch dressing quieted.

I tossed the salad in a large bowl. Students placed it on plates and served their classmates. One day, once everyone was served, I asked the class to pause before eating and think of all the steps involved in getting our salad to our plates. The sun provided energy to the green leaves that took that energy and through photosynthesis transformed it into food for itself. The farmers at Terra Firma tilled the soil, tended the growing plants, harvested the crops, loaded the truck and delivered it to our school. And we washed, chopped, tossed, served, composted, and ate together, taking in the energy from the sun and the nutrients from the soil. Spontaneously, the students stood and applauded.

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Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a connection between a local farmer and the people who eat the food the farmer produces. Consumers make a monthly financial commitment to the farm and, in return, get a weekly box of seasonal fruits and vegetables. Consumers share in the inherent risks and potential bounty of the farm, and get the opportunity to know where their food comes from. Farmers obtain a steady income year round. The idea of a committed financial relationship between consumers and farmers originated in Japan and Europe in the 1970's. Coincidentally, CSA vegetable boxes are a wonderful teaching tool in the preliminary stages of developing a school garden. For more information about CSA's, go to [www.caff.org/farms/csa.html](http://www.caff.org/farms/csa.html).

